

For the second time in less than five years, an Orange County tribe has been denied federal recognition by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

But this time it's permanent—well, almost permanent.

The Bureau said the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation failed to meet four out of seven criteria for federal recognition such as providing enough evidence that the community at large recognized the group as a tribe since the 1900s and that it has a functioning autonomous government, according to a Bureau press release.

No federal recognition means the tribe is not considered a sovereign nation and doesn't get perks such as the ability to build a casino.

Officials described the same reasons for denial in a proposed decision in 2007. The Bureau gave the tribe, which had two separate groups vying for recognition in separate filings, the opportunity to submit more evidence. After more than two years of review and delaying the deadline several times, the tribe was officially denied Wednesday. The tribe has been trying to gain federal recognition for more than three decades.

It now has 90 days to appeal the decision and undergo another lengthy review process. But if the appeal is denied, the petitioners cannot reorganize and reapply for recognition, said Nedra Darling, a Bureau spokeswoman.

The decision brought disappointment for some tribal members, but relief for others.

"The tribe is very disappointed that the (Assistant Secretary Indian Affairs) and the Office of Federal Acknowledgment failed to properly evaluate the thousands of pieces of evidence the Tribe had presented. This is a great and continued injustice to the Acjachemen Tribe," said Anthony Rivera, Jr., chairman of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation.

For years, there have been tensions among tribal members, stemming back to issues with leadership. In the 1990s, one tribal member engaged in discussions with a Nevada investor related to a casino deal, which sparked controversy among the tribe and anger among city leaders.

**Rep. John Campbell**, R-Irvine, has long been against the ability of federally recognized tribes to build casinos. He has vocally disagreed with past proposals to bring Indian casinos to Orange County.

**"The tribal petition was always without merit. I believe that the Office of the Assistant Secretary arrived at the correct decision again," Campbell said in a statement. "After 29 years and two negative determinations, there should be no more appeals and I hope this matter will be closed."**

The two separate petitions for recognition were filed by Rivera, who is listed as petitioner 84A, and Joe O'Campo and Sonia Johnston, listed as petitioner 84B. The Bureau jointly evaluated both submissions.

Some said the denial may mean better days for tribal relationships.

"It's a relief," said Cathy Lopez-O'Campo, daughter of Joe O'Campo. "Now we can come together with less pressure."

Rivera said he plans to appeal the denial, which was a long-time coming. The decision had been delayed several times in the past six months. It was supposed to come as early as October.

As it did in 2007, the Bureau said the tribe did not meet four of the seven criteria for federal recognition, including requirements that:

- Members descend from a historical Indian tribe. The Bureau found that only 61 percent of Rivera's 1,940 members and 53 percent of O'Campo and Johnston's 455 members could trace their heritage to the historical Indian tribe at San Juan Capistrano Mission.
- The group maintains political influence over members as an autonomous entity. Evidence does not show such influence since 1835.
- The group comprised a distinct community. That only existed until 1862, the Bureau found.
- External observers must identify the petitioners as an American Indian entity since 1900. Evidence shows the identification from 1997 until today, but not since 1900.

The tribe is scattered throughout Orange County but has roots in San Juan Capistrano and a special connection to the mission there.

There are 564 tribal entities recognized by the Bureau as of October 2010. Between 1978 and 2008, 82 groups submitted completed petitions to the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, according to Bureau records. Of that, about 69 have been resolved by the Department of Indian Affairs or Congress. California has submitted the most petitions.